Fwd: News Release: EPA Details Results of $100M Federal Effort to Clean up Navajo Uranium Contamination
Steve Owens
to:
Jaredblumenfeld
01/24/2013 11:00 AM
Hide Details
From: Steve Owens [redacted]
To: Jaredblumenfeld@comcast.net,

Jared:

Very cool. Great work!

Best,

Steve

EPA Details Results of $100M Federal Effort to Clean up Navajo Uranium Contamination

SAN FRANCISCO: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced progress on a coordinated five-year federal investment of more than $100 million to address health risks posed by pervasive uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation. EPA joined five other federal agencies in releasing a report today outlining the results of their Five-Year Plan. Since 2008, EPA has spent more than $50 million to clean up mines, provide safe drinking water, and demolish and replace contaminated homes. In addition to federal funds, EPA has used the Superfund law to compel responsible parties to perform an additional $17 million in mine investigations and cleanups.

Over the past five years, EPA reduced the most urgent risks to Navajo residents by remediating 34 contaminated homes, providing safe drinking water to 1825 families, and performing stabilization or cleanup work at 9 abandoned mines. The Agency also conducted field assessments of 240 water supplies and 520 mines to gain a more complete understanding of the widespread scope of potential exposures to uranium contamination on the Navajo Nation. EPA also collaborated with the Navajo Nation EPA, which performed field assessments of nearly 800 Navajo homes and other structures.

"This effort has been a great start to addressing the toxic legacy of uranium mining on Navajo lands," said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "The work done to date would not have been possible without the partnership of the six federal agencies and the Navajo Nation's EPA and Department of Justice."

The Navajo Nation encompasses more than 27,000 square miles in the Four Corners area of Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. The unique geology of the region makes the Navajo Nation rich in uranium, a radioactive ore in high demand after the development of atomic power and weapons at the close of World War II. Approximately four million tons of uranium ore were extracted during mining operations within the Navajo Nation from 1944 to 1986. Many Navajo people worked the mines, often raising their families in close proximity to the mines and mills.

Uranium mining activities no longer occur within the Navajo Nation, but the hazards of uranium contamination remain. More than 500 abandoned uranium mine claims and thousands of mine features, such as pits, trenches and holes, with elevated levels of uranium, radium and other radionuclides still exist. Health effects from exposure to these contaminants can include lung cancer, bone cancer and impaired kidney function.

"On behalf of the Navajo people I appreciate the leadership of Rep. Henry Waxman and the members of Congress who requested a multi-agency response to the Navajo Nation's testimony presented at the October 2007 hearing," said Ben Shelly, President of the Navajo Nation. "While there have been accomplishments that improved some conditions, we still need strong support from the Congress and the federal agencies to fund the clean-up of contaminated lands and water, and to address basic public health concerns due to the legacy of uranium mining and milling."

In 2007, EPA, in cooperation with the Navajo Nation, together with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Indian Health Service (IHS) developed a Five-Year Plan to address uranium contamination. All six federal agencies are committed to continue working with the Navajo Nation to further reduce risks and find long term

solutions to the remaining uranium issues on Navajo lands.

The current report can be found at:

http://www.epa.gov/region9/superfund/navajo-nation/pdf/NavajoUraniumReport2013.pdf

###